The Washington Post

PRESIDENTIAL

Donald Trump

Division and union

EPISODE TRANSCRIPT

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LILLIAN CUNNINGHAM: Nearly a year ago, I started a journey back in time through the American presidency. I left the newsroom and drove down along the dark Potomac River to Mount Vernon, George Washington's home, on a cold winter night. There were crackling fires and reanactors.

What I didn't mention back in that very first episode, though, was that there was also pop music piped in over the stereo system, making it really hard to record those little fire sounds.

This whole project has kind of been that way. Things haven't gone as planned -- tape recorders have broken, Lyndon Johnson experts have fallen sick with laryngitis right before interviews. But even more than those unexpected twists and turns, is that the present has shown up over and over and over in the past.

Fast forward 44 weeks to last night -- election night. And suddenly, all I could see was the past poking its way into the present. I watched the results roll in on the newsroom screens until early into the morning. And I thought about all the elections that have come before.

George H.W. Bush sitting alone in his hotel room, mourning his loss to Bill Clinton in 1992. The Chicago Tribune going to press with the wrong headline about Dewey defeating Truman in 1948. And then there's Rutherford B. Hayes in 1876, feeling so sure that he had lost the election that he went to sleep, only to wake up to a vote-counting battle that dragged on for months and months.

Every election in our history has had its own unique, dramatic story. And now, 227 years after George Washington took office, America has elected Donald Trump its next president. And so, just as I did for our very first episode, I decided to put on my coat, leave the newsroom and head out into the cool November night.

This time, I walked only a couple blocks away to the White House. And as I got closer, I heard the sound of someone playing bagpipes.

I'm Lillian Cunningham with The Washington Post, and this is the 44th and final episode of "Presidential."

PRESIDENTIAL THEME MUSIC

LILLIAN CUNNINGHAM: So, how did we get here? Well, that's the question we'll be exploring in this final episode; and a bit later, I'm going to talk with Dan Balz, The Washington Post's chief correspondent and our expert on the American presidency, to get his thoughts on the unique and historic nature of this year's election. But before any of that, we're going to go back in time, back to the very beginning of our presidential history, to reflect for a bit on just how far we've come and what has changed.

Alright, so two historians who are with the Library of Congress and helped me out from the very beginning of this podcast are here with me in The Washington Post studio -- Julie Miller.

JULIE MILLER: Hi.

LILLIAN CUNNINGHAM: Thanks for being here. And Michelle Krowl.

MICHELLE KROWL: And it's nice to be back.

LILLIAN CUNNINGHAM: Julie, you were the very first person I talked to.

JULIE MILLER: George Washington.

LILLIAN CUNNINGHAM: George Washington -- and the first person for George Washington whom I talked to. Since George Washington feels so long ago now, I was hoping maybe you could just give a little refresher about, as George Washington enters the presidency, what's the vision we have for what the role of president will be?

JULIE MILLER: Well, George Washington's challenge is that he was the first president. So, he didn't really know what his role would be. And one of the things that I discussed in that first podcast was Americans were concerned about -- and certainly the president was concerned about -- the ways that the separate states might individually make relationships with foreign countries, which seems sort of incredible to us today -- that New Jersey would form an alliance with Switzerland or something. But that was in fact a worry. So, the question was the way that the united government, the federal government, would work as a singular entity.

One thing I guess I would say is that when Washington was president, people were learning what a president was. And what they had known before, although remotely, was a king. And there was a magical quality attached to the person of the king. In other words, the British king was actually supposed to be you know appointed by God and to have the power of curing by laying on of hands and that sort of thing.

So, when you look at images of Washington, some of that iconography sort of survives -- the idea of him being, after his death, carried off into heaven by angels, or the idea that when he traveled girls would dress up in white dresses and strew flowers. So there was a kind of an adjustment that Americans were making about how they should regard the head of state.

You know, once this person is no longer actually religiously anointed or magical -- who was this person? And then when you get to a period of greater populism, when you get to someone like

Andrew Jackson, people aren't thinking of him in that way anymore.

They don't think that if Andrew Jackson touches your head, you'll be cured of scrofula or anything like that. They have a different set of far more realistic expectations.

MICHELLE KROWL: And interestingly, when some of the opposition party tried to criticize Jackson, they represented him as King Andrew.

JULIE MILLER: Right, that's right.

MICHELLE KROWL: So, now, instead of being the magical laying on of hands, now it's seen as, 'You have exceeded your presidential authority, and now you're being monarchical and dictatorial.'

LILLIAN CUNNINGHAM: So, one thing I've been thinking about, and taking stock of how far we've come in the presidency, is: What were some of the pivotal moments when the office seemed to change, or the type of person who held the office changed?

And, you know, after George Washington, one turning point was Andrew Jackson -- the first president who's not a founding father or a son of a founding father, and who's not part of the intellectual elite.

I'm curious, though, for both of you, who you think of -- or what moments you think of -- as transformational in shifting what we think of as who the president is or what the office is?

JULIE MILLER: If you had asked Thomas Jefferson what was an important moment of transition, he would have said, 'When I became president.'

MICHELLE KROWL: The first president that you and I talked about was Abraham Lincoln. And of course, he's a pivotal figure in the presidency partially because some of those questions that came up in Julie's time period -- of what is the United States and what relationship do the states have with the federal government -- that very much comes into play in the 1860 election. South Carolina secedes after Lincoln's election and then some of the lower South states continued to secede. So, Lincoln is now facing being the president of a literally divided Union. And is it legal for them to do that? And what are his powers under the Constitution?

And of course under Lincoln, the federal government grows more because of needing to prosecute the war. So, it's that Civil War era where those questions that started in the founding of the country have had a trial by fire and are continuing to be worked on in the post-war period, and frankly up until today -- because we're still having discussions about what is the nature of the federal government vis-a-ve the state governments. And what power does the president and Congress have over those?

LILLIAN CUNNINGHAM: And then would you considered Theodore Roosevelt to be the turning point for the 20th century, like when we started expecting our presidents more consistently to be activists and charismatic and powerful?

MICHELLE KROWL: Between Andrew Jackson and Abraham Lincoln, many people have a hard time even naming who those presidents are, because Congress was really in the ascendancy and those presidents either didn't have the political skill to be able to use the presidency, or they didn't think

that that was their role to do so.

It’s a little bit similar in the late 19th century, before you get to Theodore Roosevelt -- a lot of people have a hard time naming those presidents.

LILLIAN CUNNINGHAM: Cleveland and Harrison.

MICHELLE KROWL: Cleveland and Harrison. And, you know, maybe they might know McKinley, but definitely not Chester Arthur. So, there are points in time when the nature of either the events that are happening or the individual who occupies the office really brings attention to the office itself.

So, under people like Andrew Jackson and Lincoln and Theodore Roosevelt and Franklin Roosevelt and Lyndon Johnson -- people who really take the reins of power and want to do something with it.

And Theodore Roosevelt definitely does that. He's just so exuberant about everything in his life, including what he can do as president, and he'll push the limits of what his constitutional powers are. And he'll use the presidency as that bully pulpit.

LILLIAN CUNNINGHAM: In terms of leadership traits, are there traits that jump out to either of you as being consistent throughout the effective great presidents, whether they're our big name presidents or not?

MICHELLE KROWL: One thing that I was thinking of is the issue of communication. Many of the presidents that we look at as being most effective understood the need for communication, and actually, this gives me a chance to sort of amend something I said in the Lincoln episode. Because as we were chatting up about Lincoln not keeping a diary and not giving away too much of himself, I said, 'Oh, well he wouldn't be on Facebook and Twitter.'

And then I went home that night, and I thought, 'Wait a minute. Lincoln would have been on Facebook and Twitter.' He wouldn't tell you what he had for breakfast, but Lincoln was so interested in how technology could further his agenda and his goals. I think when we've looked at other presidents -- Theodore Roosevelt, of course, being a great example of someone who very much cultivated the press so that his message could be communicated very directly. Franklin Roosevelt --

LILLIAN CUNNINGHAM: Right, with radio.

MICHELLE KROWL: -- was brilliant with radio. And Ronald Reagan, of course, was brilliant with television, coming from a background of being an actor and understanding the power of film and media.

And we can see how it doesn't work for other people. Taft did not use the media, or did not communicate his goals as effectively. So, with some of the presidents, even if their policies were what they had promised, the fact that they couldn't communicate that to their peers or to the electorate meant they probably weren't as effective of a leader as they could have been.

Another thing that I thought of and that did occur to me is also something that Doris Kearns

Goodwin had mentioned in the Lincoln episode -- the idea of empathy.

LILLIAN CUNNINGHAM: Yeah, that stuck with me, too.

MICHELLE KROWL: It did, and just even listening to some of the news now of people who don't feel that they're being heard. They have issues. They have problems. Their jobs have gone. So, with some of the presidents that, at least in my mind have been particularly successful, they do, at least, present empathy.

And now, it's become so cliche to quote Bill Clinton with the, 'I feel your pain.' But you know, Franklin Roosevelt because of his own polio -- understanding that other people were facing hardships that were not of their own making. I think Lincoln was very empathetic. They're not going to make everybody happy, of course. But for many people, just an acknowledgment that the president is listening to them [makes a difference].

LILLIAN CUNNINGHAM: So, we talked back in the George Washington episode about humility, and that was something, Julie, that you had mentioned was a key part of Washington's leadership style and his appeal, which seems to not be as important these days.

JULIE MILLER: Well, I think when you look at George Washington's humility and self- effacement, that arose out of the time when he lived. In other words, that was a value of the 18th century. And the idea then was that the leader of the country should be someone who rises to the top by the virtue of his character.

We don't live in the 18th century anymore. We're dealing with a completely different set of values, and one of the things that is different is that we have a mass electorate. At the time that Washington was elected, most Americans were disenfranchised. So, who were those people?

They were women, with a very tiny exception. I just have to say this -- in New Jersey in 1776, all the colonies became states and they wrote new constitutions -- New Jersey, for reasons that are not entirely clear, allowed women to vote. Women voted in Jersey from 1776 to 1887. At that point, the state legislature of New Jersey decided that the women were voting in a way they didn't like. They rewrote their clause in their constitution to make it clear that only men could vote.

But the point is that the kind of people who were voting -- with the small New Jersey exception -- were upper class white men -- landholders, for example. You had to have property in order to vote. So, these were people who sort of share the values of the elite.

Now, when you get to Jackson's period, many more people voted. More landless men voted -- still no women. Even some former slaves -- men -- could vote in that period in some states. So, there's a much wider and more diverse group of voters.

And the candidate for the presidency has to play, in a sense, to the values of the voters. And the voters have changed. The people who vote now much more accurately represent the population of United States than they did at the start.

LILLIAN CUNNINGHAM: Part of what that means is that campaigning has changed. We've seen slogans and songs dating all the way back to the 1800's, like this one -- one of my favorites from William Henry Harrison's campaign.

WILLIAM HENRY HARRISON SONG

MICHELLE KROWL: Another thing we might mention is just the different nature of campaigning itself, too. So, when we start with Julie's period, presidential candidates don't go out and campaign themselves. They are understood to be standing for the presidency, but they have surrogates campaigning on their behalf, even up until William McKinley and a little bit past that.

But then, what we're so used to in the 20th century is the candidates themselves being out on the stump and having to convince the voters directly. And I don't think once you get that change that you could have someone like George Washington saying, 'I'm not worthy of this. I'm not good enough for this.' I think now people would probably tend to agree with you!

So, how we understand presidents and our relationship with them as voters and observers has changed over the years, partially because of them being much more front and center.

LILLIAN CUNNINGHAM: Right. Well, one thing that has been talked about so much this past year is that it's been such a vitriolic campaign -- that the country feels so divided. And I was hoping that you both could just help put into context: How dark and messy and nasty period is this in our history?

JULIE MILLER: Vitriol goes back to the very beginning. I think we have a habit of looking back at the founders as examples. I think this is a case where maybe we would rather not because, in fact, the gloves are off, you know, in the early campaigns.

Thomas Jefferson -- his language could be very vituperative about the opposite party. In 1798, when Adams was president, he wrote, 'A little patience, and we shall see the reign of witches pass over, their spells dissolve, and the people recovering their true sight, restore their government to its true principles.'

In other words, when those federalists with their monarchist leanings are finally out of office, we Democratic Republicans can take over. So, you know, so he's not moderate. So there's not -- I mean, you know, there are questions about why it is that there was so much bitterness. And one of the arguments about this is that there were no organized political parties, as we have them today, that can sort of come up with talking points. And these were people who are struggling against people that they really felt were their sworn enemies who represented points of view that they wanted to crush.

MICHELLE KROWL: But now one thing I appreciate about being a historian is -- I think because we study a long period of time, we can somewhat see a broader view of things to realize, to some degree, there's nothing new under the sun.

I remember several years ago, some friends and I who were also historians -- we were trying to play this little game of, 'Well certainly, it must've been better at some point?' And we'd say, 'Well, what about…? No. What about…? No.'

You know, so, politics has been nasty from the beginning -- the name calling, the rumors, the election of 1828 with Andrew Jackson. They said horrible things about Rachel Jackson in that election, and it was potentially a contributing factor to her heart attack after his election. So, for

Jackson, he never forgave his opponents. And supposedly, when he left office in 1837 -- Henry Clay was one of his big rivals -- he said, 'After eight years as president, I have only two regrets -- that I have not shot Henry Clay or hanged John C. Calhoun.'

So, a lot of passion comes up in these things. Or when you go to the 1884 election, the illegitimate baby scandal that was lobbed against Grover Cleveland -- I mean, it read like the National Enquirer. It was just this whole sordid scandal, which maybe had a glimmer of truth in it but had been played up quite a bit.

You know, in Harding's time, there were accusations that he had African-American ancestry that were never proven. And at that point, that was something that people would have taken to be scandalous or problematic. So, we've had, at various points in our history, a lot of mudslinging.

JULIE MILLER: And don't forget the Hamilton-Burr duel.

MICHELLE KROWL: I should just say that one constant that exists is that the United States, from the start, has been large and diverse in terms of economy, climate and culture.

JULIE MILLER: The initial colonies, for example, had difficulty understanding how they would even get along. And I think we continued to see, for example, that people who live farther from the Capitol tend to have greater mistrust of it and this was apparent in colonial Virginia.

I always think about Bacon's Rebellion in 1670 something or other. And Nathaniel Bacon was settled on the frontier. And he led a rebellion into Williamsburg and attempted to overthrow the governor. And it had to do with someone on the frontier feeling that he didn't want to answer to the governor in the Capitol.

You know, there's always been a kind of a West-East frontier-capital conflict in this country, and it goes back a very long way.

LILLIAN CUNNINGHAM: So, when people talk today about how divided the country feels, does it sound to you just like --

JULIE MILLER: It's always been true. I think division has been the norm. In the early part of the United States, people said ‘These United States,’ you know? Now we say ‘The United States’ -- because we take it for granted that we live in a country called The United States. But people used to feel that they lived in states that were a federation -- that were united into a federation, but that were individual and that individual interests and individual cultures and individual economies and ways of doing things. And slavery was obviously an enormous dividing point before the Civil War.

MICHELLE KROWL: And as you get into the late 19th century, some of the divisions that you see politically are rural versus urban. And as industrialization comes in, particularly in the late 19th century, you start seeing a lot of people -- or a lot more people -- moving to the cities.

And the farmers are feeling that their interests are being threatened. So, some of the rise of farmers alliances and populism, and we've also had questions about immigration before, too.. Immigrant groups and ethnic groups and race and equality -- all of those things have been issues throughout a large part of our history.

JULIE MILLER: One thing that's kind of striking, though, just to think about unity for a moment, is the ways that people have used the Declaration of Independence over the whole course of the nation's history as a way to say, 'Wait a minute. Why aren't we sticking to these values?'

In 1848, a group of women met in upstate New York in Seneca Falls, and they drew up what they called a Declaration of Sentiments. Well what is it? It's the Declaration of Independence -- except that they say “all men and women are created equal,” so there are differences, but there's a kind of a unity of values -- or of the values that people would like to strive towards or would like to hold the country to.

LILLIAN CUNNINGHAM: Alright, well this seems as good a moment as any to plant ourselves back in the present and start thinking about where this election that we've just lived through fits into the larger story of American history.

For that, I have pulled my colleague Dan Balz away from the frenzy of election coverage. Dan is the chief correspondent for The Washington Post. He's our politics guru around here. And for the past year, he's also essentially been a lending library for me of presidential history books.

Thanks so much for doing this, Dan.

DAN BALZ: You're welcome. Thanks, Lillian.

LILLIAN CUNNINGHAM: You've covered many presidential elections, and you've studied even more. What do you think was fundamentally different and new about this election? And then more importantly, I'd love to hear what you think that change tells us about how our country has changed.

DAN BALZ: This is the certainly the most unusual election that I've covered, or that I can recall from my reading of history. In terms of modern politics, it's been it's been so dramatically different, and I think primarily because Donald Trump has been a dramatically different candidate than any major party has nominated in our lifetimes.

He didn't play by any of the traditional rules. He defeated in the primaries traditional candidates with unconventional methods of campaigning. He changed many of the ways we think about political communication.

And what's been different about the general election is that we would have thought that what we would see in a campaign between Hillary Clinton and a Republican nominee was a pretty sharp ideological difference. This has not been that at all. This has not been a campaign that's been waged on issues, for example.

The choices that people are making are much more on character, temperament, personality, trust, honesty -- those kinds of things.

Again, those are always part of a presidential choice. Character is always something that the voters consider. But in this case, I think it's been overriding and overwhelming, and I think that we've seen that both candidates have had challenges with that. And so, it's made this campaign different in that way. I think the other is that, you know, the tone and tenor of this campaign has

been very sharp, very harsh, very negative, very personal in a lot of ways.

I mean, the number of people we all know and we've all run into who have been ready for this campaign to be over is quite extraordinary. It's been an exhausting campaign and very dispiriting in a lot of ways. So, in that way, it's different. How much it is a template for the future -- I don't know -- in part because Trump is so unconventional and so different.

But I think there are things that we see in this campaign that we probably should expect in the future. One is how quickly information moves and is digested and then almost forgotten about. It's extraordinary. If you go back through the course of this campaign, the things that have happened that have kind of almost slipped from memory -- and I think that may be part of the era that we're in, it may be a function of social media and the speed with which information moves and our short attention spans. And so, I think that that may be a harbinger of the future, regardless of who the candidates are in the future.

LILLIAN CUNNINGHAM: And what you mentioned about the focus on character as even more of the deciding factor in voter's minds -- do you think that that also represents a shift? Or tells us something about what we care about today?

DAN BALZ: I think it's possible, and I think that the more we are in a time in which people focus on character and personality, generally, not just in politics but in everything --

LILLIAN CUNNINGHAM: Social media.

DAN BALZ: Social media, and, I mean, entertainment in the arts, and all kinds of things. There's so much focus on personality and persona -- and also on something somebody just said or something somebody just did -- which is different than a conversation about somebody's economic policy or some aspect of Middle East policy.

That's kind of the way the world works right now. And so, in that way, those aspects of presidential candidates are likely to be focused on significantly in the future.

LILLIAN CUNNINGHAM: Let's talk for a moment just about leading without a mandate and entering office without a really strong mandate. When else do you think that we've seen this? And what has sort of historically worked for a new president to help overcome those divisions, heal the country, mobilize people behind a vision as they enter?

DAN BALZ: Well, I think we're in a different period historically than we were 20 years ago or 40 years ago. In those earlier periods, campaigns were hard-fought. But I think that there was a general feeling that when the election was over, the country tried to come together, and there was a certain respect for the new president, whether people had voted for that person or not.

And there was a belief that that president got kind of a honeymoon. And leaders in both parties bought into that notion -- of that was kind of the way things worked. We're not at that point today and not just because of 2016. You know, we saw in 2000, after the 2000 election, there was a period in which people tried to come together after what had been a very very, very, very divisive recount and a decision by the Supreme Court that put George W. Bush into the White House. But there was also a lot of partisanship around that. Then, 9/11 happened and there was a moment of unity, and yet we saw that dissipate probably faster than we thought.

President Obama won election in 2008. There was a feeling at that moment of the country trying to come together, and there were some extraordinary problems because of the financial collapse that suggested there would be a moment in which people would kind of put aside rancor, and say, 'We've got big problems we need to solve.' Instead, we saw the country snap back into kind of the red-blue partisanship that we had seen before.

President Obama thought, I think, after 2012 that he had won a big enough victory -- that that would prompt the Republicans to work with him, or that he would be able to work with the Republicans. That didn't happen. So, I think that leading without a mandate is in some ways more the norm that we have today.

There was a famous memo that James Rowe, who was an adviser to Harry Truman, wrote to President Truman back in the 40s -- in '48. One of the points he made was that the president has the ability to lead only so far as he can affect public opinion to be with him.

I think we're in a period where that is extraordinarily difficult now -- to get anything approaching a significant majority of people to be behind a president. The partisanship that we've seen in this election is, I suspect, lasting.

So, Donald Trump will have a very, very difficult time trying to create a consensus for leadership. A lot of that will depend on the relationship between the Congress. And I don't want to overstate that we're in uncharted waters, but we are in uncharted waters a little bit. And I think it's extremely difficult right now for any president to claim a mandate. Trump is going to have to, in a sense, create the goodwill or the conditions that allow progress to be made.

LILLIAN CUNNINGHAM: So, over this podcast we've seen the country elect prudent pragmatists, big risk-taking dreamers, outsiders, insiders. What do you think that Donald Trump's election illuminates for us about the type of leadership our country feels it needs right now?

DAN BALZ: I think that the victory by Donald Trump is a ratification of the view that the country was just disgusted with the kind of leadership that they have been getting; that they had listened to people who were in leadership tell them things over the years -- whether it was that they were going to improve their lives or that they were going to solve certain problems; that they simply had lost faith in the leadership that the country had been offering them; and that they felt that, in Donald Trump, there was somebody who was determined to shake up the system, who was from so far outside that system that he would, by the very arrival of him in Washington, bring a totally different style to the way the presidency was going to work.

I mean, we know Donald Trump prides himself on being a dealmaker. We don't have any idea of quite how he will operate as president in trying to make those deals, but we know that from all indications, what the people who elected Donald Trump were saying was, 'We want something dramatic. We don't want status quo. We don't want even a small change. We want something big and different,' and that in Donald Trump, they're putting their trust.

LILLIAN CUNNINGHAM: When you think about what we do know of how he works his willl and operates, and you look back for any parallels in history, what do you think we can anticipate about how effective his personality and leadership style could be in the presidency?

DAN BALZ: I think it's a big question mark, frankly.

I think that we don't know the balance between the discipline that's required of a president to the United States to stay focused -- to stay, in a sense, mature in the way they communicate -- because we know everything a president says or does can have outsized consequences, can have outsized consequences to the economy, can have outsized consequences to our relationship with our allies, to the way our adversaries see us.

Donald Trump has been a couple of different things through this campaign. Toward the end, he became a more disciplined candidate. But we know that there are aspects of his person and his character and his temperament -- and he's advertised this -- that he likes to be unpredictable. I think the question of what's the balance between unpredictability and stability, and we don't know how he will strike that as president of the United States.

He will be surrounded by a lot of people who will say, 'Be careful. Don't do certain things.' On the other hand, we've known that there were people around him during the campaign who said, 'Be careful. Don't do certain things,' and he ignored their advice because he's a visceral and instinctive politician. And he understands the era in which we're in, in which people kind of respond to that. But he's in a totally different place than he's ever been.

This is not making real estate deals. This is this is much more serious than that. And I think he is going to have to take a measure of himself and ask himself what kind of leader he thinks he can be, and what's the most effective way for him to be able to do that.

LILLIAN CUNNINGHAM: Any thoughts on what his relationship with Congress might look like?

DAN BALZ: I think it will be tendentious. I think it will be difficult. And I think that there will be times when he looks like he's working with them, and there will be times when he will go off and do whatever he wants to do. And it will create some heartburn, particularly for the Republicans, who want to have a decent relationship, but in many ways may have a different agenda than Donald Trump.

Paul Ryan spent much of the campaign talking about, in a sense, the Paul Ryan or the conservative agenda -- it's not many of the issues that Donald Trump campaigned hard on and got elected on. Toward the end of the campaign, there were times when he sounded like almost a generic Republican nominee. The speech he gave in Gettysburg back in October was one in which he sounded at parts of it like a Republican nominee.

But there are other things that he's done, particularly on trade, which is not what the Republicans have campaigned for for years. On immigration, we know the party is split on that, and we know which side he comes down on, so there's going to be tension between the agenda that he has pushed and the agenda that Paul Ryan and some of the Republicans may want to push.

LILLIAN CUNNINGHAM: As you think about this new chapter in American history with Trump about to be president – about to come into office -- what are the the big questions that are on your mind that you're waiting to see play out?

DAN BALZ: Well, I think the biggest question with Donald Trump as president is: Is there any possibility of healing in the country? Or is he such a divisive figure, even though he was able to win

a majority in the Electoral College, that the country will never begin to come around him and that we will be in constant warfare?

I mean, I think that was always a risk, no matter who the country elected. But we know what a majority of the people thought about Donald Trump's readiness to be president, even as the country was electing him. And so, I think that there is such venom on both sides that, unless he changes, it will be very difficult for that part of the country that was so wholly opposed to him to begin to warm to the idea or even accept him as president.

And so, I think that's a very big question. I mean, are we headed for four years of continued divisiveness, continued rancor, in which those two camps -- I mean, the pro-Trump camp and the anti-Trump Camp -- are just constantly at war with one another, almost regardless of how he's leading?

LILLIAN CUNNINGHAM: Just as a very last thing. I think so many people do feel dispirited by this election -- it was long and raw. Is there anything that sort of, beneath it all, lends some hopefulness?

DAN BALZ: Well, I mean I would say the American people are very resilient. You know, there's a certain common sense about the country. We've faced difficult periods historically. This is the way America has always been. We've moved forward. We've adapted to the times. We've dealt with big challenges. We get through them.

And I think that if if there's anything that we should all, you know, take at the end of this very long and difficult campaign is that we're working our way through a lot of things. It wasn't just that we're working our way through a contest between Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton. The country's changing. The country's going through a transition -- a transformation. People are learning how to live with the new country that we're in. And I think that people are coming to terms with what this new America is.

LILLIAN CUNNINGHAM: Now, before we wrap up, I want to think first some time about where women have been all along in our presidential history. We've now spent 44 weeks studying and thinking about the men who held the nation's highest office.

And in doing that, we've come across all these stories about women who've shaped the presidency in different ways. There were first ladies like Dolley Madison who mastered the art of political schmoozing to help her husband. There was Julia Sand, whose letters to Chester Arthur inspired him to turn over a new leaf upon taking the presidency. There was Helen Taft, who had more ambition and political interest than her husband ever had but whose only vehicle for expressing that passion was through her husband's career. There was Edith Wilson, who quietly ran the Oval Office after her husband's stroke. And there was Eleanor Roosevelt, who had a strong hand in shaping policy and a strong public voice in FDR's administration.

So, here I just want to come back to Julie Miller and Michelle Krowl -- my bedrock historians. So, Julie, Michelle. I'm curious: Were there particular presidents who really helped to further the progress of women in this country? It doesn't seem like that's something that came up very much in our 44-episode study.

JULIE MILLER: They just didn't do that. They thought in terms of the end of slavery, which they

didn't do much about -- but they had the imagination to think about it. They've considered the position of women as being much more immutable.

So, for example, Thomas Jefferson was quite firm on the idea that women should have no role to play in public life. And he wrote about this. In one letter to Angelica Schuyler Church – who, as you may know, was in fact the sister-in-law of Alexander Hamilton. Both he and Hamilton were writing her these flirtatious letters. He wrote to her, 'You see by' -- I should say, this is in September of 1788. So, by this time the Constitution is ratified -- 'You see by the papers, and I suppose by your letters, also, how much your native state has been agitated by the question of the new Constitution. But that need not agitate you. The tender breasts of ladies were not formed for political convulsion.'

You know, there's this famous exchange from Abigail Adams, who, had she been able to be president, I think, would have been a very good president. What she says is very meaningful. She wrote this in March of 1776, and she writes to her husband in Philadelphia. And she says, 'I long to hear that you have declared an independency, and by the way, in the new code of laws, which I suppose it will be necessary for you to make, I desire you would remember the ladies and be more generous and favorable to them than your ancestors. Do not put such unlimited power into the hands of the husbands. Remember, all men would be tyrants if they could. If particular care and attention is not paid to the ladies, we are determined to foment a rebellion and will not hold ourselves bound by any laws in which we have no voice or representation.'

So, I just I think it's worth remembering that that was perhaps not taken seriously when it was said, but it was said as early as 1776.

But when he writes back, his tone is very clear. He laughs at her, and he says, 'As to your extraordinary code of laws, I cannot but laugh.'

You know, he's basically saying, 'How hilarious that women think they might have rights.'

And then she writes again, actually, she says, 'I cannot say that I think you are very generous to the ladies. For while you are proclaiming peace and goodwill to men emancipating all nations, you insist upon retaining an absolute power over wives.' And she's not speaking theoretically. She's speaking about an actual law. In other words, the way the law worked, women were subsumed into the identities of their husbands. So they had no separate legal or civil identity.

So, again, he was laughing at her. She was sort of proposing it, but she knew there was no hope. Now, fast forward to the middle of the 19th century ,and Elizabeth Cady Stanton says the same thing. But she says it in tones really of fury in what she says at Seneca Falls in 1848. She says, 'We are assembled to protest against a form of government existing without the consent of the governed -- to declare our right to be free as man is free -- to be represented in the government, which we are taxed to support, to have such disgraceful laws as give man the power to chastise and imprison his wife, to take the wages which she earns, the property which she inherits, and in the case of operation, the children of her love.'

So I guess the answer to your question is: There really weren't a lot of presidents who worked for the forwarding of the rights of women. It was really women do that for themselves. And they started speaking -- writing about this -- with Mary Wollstonecraft at the end of the 18th century. And the women who were involved in the women's movement in the middle 19th century had all

been involved in abolition. And as they worked to emancipate slaves, they built up a head of fury about their own condition. And that fury I think powered them into a movement that, ultimately, many years later, finally elapsed in a constitutional amendment that gave women the right to vote.

And I should say that Western states gave women the right to vote earlier -- so in 1869, women could vote in Wyoming and then the following year in Utah. So, the West -- western states were also among the first to drop property requirements much earlier for voting in the West -- very often was where there were young people with new ideas. That's where these things developed.

But it's a very deeply entrenched cultural value that women should not be in control.

MICHELLE KROWL: Well, and also, see how long it really took for women to be not anomalies, even in Congress? You know, you have Jeannette Rankin and some other people along the way earlier; but for a quite a long time, there were so few of them that they could meet at somebody's house for dinner.

JULIE MILLER: For example, when women first got the vote -- and even before, when women started campaigning for the vote -- when you look at the popular press, there's all these cartoons making fun of women -- showing men pushing baby carriages and gigantic women hitting men over the head with parasols and that sort of thing. Because there was this idea that it was just ridiculous, you know, for a woman to assume that she could be in charge of the country or hold a profession.

So, for example, when the women's rights convention meets in Seneca Falls, there were editorials in the press basically laughing at them, saying, 'Hahaha. Soon, you know, they will be doctors. Hahaha.'

Well, they are doctors now. So there's been there's been an enormous change, and I think it's recent -- it's relatively recent.

LILLIAN CUNNINGHAM: So many of you who've been listening to this podcast called in and left me voicemails to share what you've learned about the American presidency.

LISTENER: Hi, LIllian. This is Dave from Los Angeles.

LISTENER: Hi Lillian, my name is Ana Rosados. I live in Clinton, Massachusetts.

LISTENER: This is John from Cincinnati.

LISTENER: My name is Kyle. I'm from Bloomington, Indiana.

LISTENER: My name is James, and I live in Brooklyn.

LISTENER: Hi, Lily. It's Candice and I'm from western Utah.

LISTENER: Hi, Lillian. Charlie from Alaska.

LISTENER: This is Sam Shepard. I'm from Augusta, Georgia.

LISTENER: My name is Terry. I live in Hawaii, Hawaii.

LISTENER: My name is Danny and I'm from Westchester, Pennsylvania.

LISTENER: This is Joe from Charleston, South Carolina.

LISTENER: Hi, this is Linda Silverman. I'm from Potomac, Maryland.

LISTENER: Hi, Lillian. This is Christopher from Sulphur Springs, Indiana.

LISTENER: My name is Bill. I'm from Chicago.

LISTENER: My name is Jen and I'm calling from Gilbert, Arizona.

LISTENER: My name's Eric, and I live in Asheville, North Carolina.

LISTENER: Hi, my name is Dave. I live in New York City.

LISTENER: My name is Anwan, and I live in Houstin, Texas.

LISTENER: Hi, Lillian. This is Jean from St. Louis, Missouri. really and this is Jean from St. Louis Missouri.

LISTENER: My name is Bill. I'm from Madison, Wisconsin.

LISTENER: This is Christy from Atlanta, Georgia. Hi, Lillian.

LISTENER: My name is Matthew, and I'm in Westminster, Colorado.

LISTENER: I think we all tend to think of presidents as one-dimensional or icons for their greatest achievement or their greatest challenge. But it's important to remember that each of them is a flawed human being.

LISTENER: Some of them have been very quiet and reserved, while some have been very boisterous and outspoken. Those personality traits have served each of them in different ways.

LISTENER: The leadership style and the background of predicaments are just the verses versus America itself.

LISTENER: You know, each one has had their deep flaws as well as their incredible strengths.

LISTENER: You see some people who come into leadership who have a great strength and weakness and just kind of ride it through, whether they are bad, but then you also see people like JFK, who are able to preserve a certain core part of themselves but also develop the traits and personality to be an effective leader. And I think that's what stuck with me the most -- that ability to learn and grow.

LISTENER: There's a perception that when you go in as president, you're going to grab the levers of

power and kind of run the big machine and work your will. It almost seems like it's the opposite. It's like this incredible weight of all of these people and their needs in the country and this crises you can't even perceive at the outset. And a a lot of their presidency is just determined -- they rise or fall, I think, by their ability to kind of dance with it.

LISTENER: And just the chaos and the randomness that let some men be great and some men be almost forgotten.

LISTENER: To be effective, doesn't mean that you're going to be liked, and to be liked doesn't mean that you're effective.

LISTENER: Both Buchanan and Adams were among the most qualified people to become president of all time. Yet, they were both, quite frankly, bad at the job.

LISTENER: No matter how much a candidate thinks he's ready for it, he's not, and it's going to surprise when he gets in. It's just an incredible job to take on.

LISTENER: The one that stuck with me the most was just a terribly tragic, accidental death of the son of Franklin Pierce just right before he took office.

LISTENER: And I've been thinking a lot about the Andrews -- you know, Andrew Johnson thrust into a position he wasn't prepared for, and then Andrew Jackson, with, you know, his populism and what it leaves me with in regards to leadership is that if you come with love of your country, that's about as good a place to start.

LISTENER: It's easy to think, especially in today's climate, that there are people that do it just for the power of doing it, but there really has just been this amazing urgency to create good for the American people.

LISTENER: I didn't realize how much I would live Grover Cleveland.

LISTENER: The thing that strikes me the most is the difference between the judgment of the president's contemporaries and how the future thinks about them.

LISTENER: I had a rather superficial notion about the ones I experienced in my own lifetime, especially George H.W. Bush.

LISTENER: I don't support specific things that Obama did, but when I look back -- when I get near the end of my life -- will I look back and think about President Obama's policies? I feel like I could totally look back and say, 'Hey, this was transformational.'

LISTENER: You know, I'm 27. So, I kind of grew up in the era of everybody lives in their own personal media bubble, and it's easy in that sort of environment to see large figures for a single land. So, you know, Bush Sr., bad. Clinton, good. Bush Jr., bad. Obama, good. And the whole Presidential podcast has really been sort of an exercise in nuance and being able to see that, you know, there are no easy decisions when you're operating at that level.

LISTENER: There's a context for every president. And there isn't just good or evil -- that there are many shades of gray.

LISTENER: In the end, their lives offer a path to our nation's history -- its accomplishments and its failures.

LISTENER: And that there's so many things that repeat themselves and so many issues that keep coming up.

LISTENER: The presidents we have reflect our continuing struggles as a nation around issues of race and gender.

LISTENER: I'm driving back from the gym, and I'm bawling my eyes out. And I'm not sure why. I think it's because I just care so deeply about the history of this country, the cuture of this country. And I think in reflecting back on past presidents' successes and failures, it's given me a great deal of hope that our country will figure it out. This remarkable experiment that is the United States of America --

LILLIAN CUNNINGHAM: That's a question that I have been asking myself a lot lately as this series comes to an end, and it's a question that I'm sure I'm going to keep asking myself for a long, long time. I'll ask myself that every time I hear about race riots around the country, or stalemates on Capitol Hill, or women fighting for equal pay, or immigrants trying to forge a better life.

I'm going to look at little kids who love poetry and think, 'You could be president.' I'll look at little kids who are on their student councils and think, 'You could be president.' I'll look at little kids who are orphans or troublemakers or paralyzed or in deep poverty and think, 'You could be president.'

I have learned a lot about the American presidency over the past 44 weeks, but I have probably learned even more about joy and sorrow and resilience.

Because I'm a very sentimental person and I'm finishing this podcast in the really dark hours after the election, what I'm going to do pretty soon now is take a deep breath, click the 'Publish' button on this episode, and then I'm going to walk down to the Lincoln Memorial to catch the sunrise.

It will be one of those cold, late-fall sunrises, quiet at a time when the world everywhere else feels really loud. And I'm pretty sure that the words that will be going through my head as I'm standing on those icy steps and looking out at the dawn won't actually be the words of Lincoln.

They'll be the words of Julia Sand, just an ordinary citizen who wrote to Chester Arthur as he was taking over the presidency. They were words from the people to the person who's about to be in power. She wrote, 'It is for you to choose whether your record shall be written in black or gold -- for the sake of your country, for your own sake and for the sakes of all who have ever loved you, let it be pure and bright.'